

[00:00:00] **Tony DeVincenzo:** And I think at a core level too, the more you're aligned, the more you understand each other, the better information you're gonna get.

[00:01:45] **Christina Rouse:** Forensic interviewers do not happen in a silo, and I have two guests with me today that can help provide clarity and context around the MDTs in alignment with this process. I'm glad you're both part of my professional team, Greg and Tony, thanks for being here today.

[00:02:02] **Greg Flett:** Ah, thanks for having us. Really excited to talk about teams with you, Christina.

[00:02:06] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Yeah, Christina, thanks so much. I'm looking forward to this conversation.

[00:02:09] **Christina Rouse:** So we're all part of a larger C E C movement on the regional, on the national level, and we're working with frontline service providers daily. So I wanna give our listeners some additional insight into your all's expertise around this subject, about M D T and forensic interviewer alignment.

So Tony, tell us a little bit more about yourself and your involvement with MDTs and forensic interviews.

[00:02:33] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Yeah, sure. So, my background's actually in law enforcement, so had a 25 year law enforcement career here in New Jersey where I'm coming to you from today. About half of those years were doing child abuse investigations, so, I was also a forensic interviewer as well.

Cuz in New Jersey. Primarily law enforcement does the forensic interviews for child abuse investigations. When I retired, I went to work for the C a C, so I was a N D T coordinator. So I coordinated our team for a number of years before I took a position where I am now with the Northeast Regional children's Advocacy Center, where I provide training technical assistance to the CACs.

MDTs in the Northeast region. So I do a lot of work with the frontline people that are doing child abuse investigations around their team development, their team alignment. so that's where I'm at right

[00:03:25] **Christina Rouse:** now. So I imagine you're bringing that dual hat role, being an interviewer and a law enforcement investigator.

I can't imagine the things that you're gonna share with us today as we get into it. I hope so. Yeah. So, Tony, you and I both know that Greg loves to talk about MDTs. I do. But Greg, tell our listeners a little more about your history

[00:03:47] **Greg Flett:** in the movement. Yeah. So I actually got started in the work as a clinical social worker doing therapy with kids.

And quickly found that I, really rathered the program management side of things. So, found myself helping to run C a C in Long Island, New York. And was tasked with facilitating their multidisciplinary team running case review. Helping with coordination, that kind of thing.

Hung out there for a while really caught the bug and loved the C A C M D T world. Loved working with teams. But life took me over to the western region and I worked at a C A C in Boulder, Colorado. So got to see a different kind of team there for a little bit. And it was there that I really started.

diving into work with teams, doing team training. Worked with the Western region for a while. Running team weeks. So we got to work with teams over the course of like three and a half days doing some really, I intense work with them. And I've been at regionals ever since.

I worked in the northeast region for a little while doing team training, focusing on multidisciplinary teams, and now I'm here in the southern region really running a small team that includes you, Christina, and our colleague Lydia, that is focused on supporting CACs and multidisciplinary teams throughout the southern region.

So, yeah, I caught the bug and got it real bad. I can't not look in the world now and see teams functioning and get really excited about 'em.

[00:05:05] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah. Well then you're gonna love our conversation today, Greg, about teams. Before we get into the meat of our conversation, talking about M D T and Fi, we're gonna reference fi a little bit throughout the episode, which we mean the forensic interview.

There's the forensic interview process, and then there's actually the person forensic interviewer, which in months some centers the investigator, might also be the forensic interviewer. So we know we, have a wide range of possibilities for that dynamic. But we're gonna talk about the alignment between the two.

Before we get into it, I think we should talk about how we, the three of us, maybe collectively define alignment. And Tony, I've heard you talk about

alignment a lot, and your analogy is the mechanic analogy with the axles of a car. So tell us a little bit how you define alignment in this work.

[00:06:00] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Yeah, I have used that analogy before about a lot, like aligning your tires and yeah, and sometimes you need a full realignment and sometimes you just need to tap back into place.

But the word that comes to mind when I think about alignment is shared, When we're talking about a team being aligned for me, we're talking about. A team that has shared goals, that has a shared understanding of the tasks that each member has and the role that each member plays towards those team goals and how that all fits in to conducting a team investigation that kind of has that concept of shared goals, a shared vision, a shared mission.

[00:06:39] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I love that shared vision because I think a lot of times people think it's more of the practical, concrete, task oriented things, and we forget about that vision sharing. So I love that. Greg, you've likened alignment to a blueprint during the investigation. So tell us a little bit about how your blueprint analogy fits into

[00:07:04] **Greg Flett:** alignment.

I think of it as working from the same set of instructions. and they're not going to be identical. When you look at a blueprint, there's plans on there for the carpenter, for the electricians, for the plumbers and they're gonna be doing different things.

But if they don't have a blueprint to operate from a shared set of instructions that they're all referencing. Then they can get into some trouble. You know, The last thing you wanna do is put up the drywall before you run the plumbing and the electrical. That's gonna be a problem. So when we think about teams with all of these players on it we really want them to have a sense of, same as Tony said, what each other is doing, the order in which we're gonna do those things, why we're doing them and really to have that shared sense of.

Understanding about the process and the approach and without that, it it can get mucked up pretty good pretty quick.

[00:07:54] **Christina Rouse:** Do you all feel that alignment is taken for granted in our movement, meaning that folks come into these roles as investigators or interviewers and people just assume that they know how to be aligned with everybody else?

[00:08:11] **Greg Flett:** Yes. Yeah, I think so. And I think it's one of those things that if you're not conscientious of it, you're not being somewhat intentional and aware of it, you can miss sight of the value of alignment. We're all going a hundred miles an hour. Caseloads are high these days, and everybody's got a lot on their plate.

While it doesn't take a long time to, remind ourselves of alignment, if we don't pause and take some time for it, we can get into trouble. So, I don't think it's with intent or I don't think it's that we're not. Trying to work collectively together in most cases, it's just one of those things gets missed pretty quickly, pretty easily sometimes.

[00:08:51] **Tony DeVincenzo:** I would just add to that I don't know if taken for granted is how I would describe it, I think oftentimes and where teams have challenges is they're just not intentional about. Talking about alignment and what alignment means and what it looks like for your specific team, right?

Because like Greg said, it's gonna look different for every team. And if we're not intentional about really having those conversations about what aligned looks like that's where a lot of teams run into challenges.

[00:09:19] **Christina Rouse:** if you're a new team member or law enforcement investigator, and Tony, we'll tap into your history here How were you taught to be aligned with all of these other agencies that maybe you never worked with before? Like how did that work?

[00:09:32] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Oh, I've seen it work really well and I've seen it work not so well. And again, I think it kind of gets back to that. intentional piece. And I know you and Greg talk about this a lot and I'll defer to the two of you, but I think onboarding is such a key part of that and really, I don't wanna keep repeating myself, but really being intentional about how you onboard new members.

Cuz I think one of the challenges I know that I had when I first became a forensic interviewer and, just. An investigator in this type of a unit was, they have all these different players and they all have these different roles and it's really hard to. What everybody does and how they go about doing their business.

Unless, there's a formal way to go about doing that, and I don't want to date myself, but going back a wave, there wasn't a lot of conversation about that. You just kind of learned on the fly. And that caused a lot of challenges.

[00:10:26] **Greg Flett:** Greg, what about you? Yeah, so I think that's one of the challenges is that most of the folks entering the C A C M D T world they've worked in their field prior to joining these teams.

Mm-hmm. And so they've, Oftentimes had an experience where they need to find alignment with a colleague. With a partner, but it's someone who's in their same discipline. Right? So it's C P S worker finding alignment with another c p s worker. They already speak that same language. Mm-hmm. It's not until we have to find these folks.

Figuring out how to work collaboratively with folks of very different disciplines, different backgrounds, different trainings that we see these opportunities for. Y alignment being so critical, but more challenging than to get in that same space. off the bat.

[00:11:14] **Christina Rouse:** and with this season being all about developing forensic interviewers, alignment happens amongst all M D T agencies and service providers. I think we can all agree that that's true, but we're gonna focus very specifically on the forensic interview process and the forensic interviewer and the M D T investigators.

And that bucket can be. Child protective service investigators or law enforcement investigators. But why is the alignment between those two roles specifically need to be lifted and to use the word of the episode intentional? Why are those two roles needing to be intentional?

[00:11:55] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Well, I think, At its core, and without making it too simplistic, I mean, typically right. That's where the investigation starts. There's an outcry there's a report, however that comes in. And typically The first time that the team is coming together is for this forensic interview.

So, I think You know, It has the potential right to set the stage for the rest of the investigation and how the rest of the investigation is gonna flow. So having, the initial investigators, whether it's law enforcement, c p s, both and the forensic interviewer on the same page at the very beginning of the investigation, like I said, it's really gonna set the tone.

for the way the investigation is gonna flow. And what I always talk to when I'm talking to frontline investigators too is that initial contact is really gonna have an impact on. The way the family responds to the intervention by the M D T. And we know that that could be a challenge you know, talking about from an investigative standpoint, keeping a family engaged can be a real challenge, and I think having those initial investigators aligned around, Again, getting back to a

shared purpose, a shared mission, a shared vision of the way that this should go, will really help that family.

Take a look at this team and be like, okay, these are people I could trust. These are people that are here for me. I'm gonna stay on board

[00:13:24] **Greg Flett:** with this.

[00:13:25] **Christina Rouse:** So knowing that there's a lot of overlap between the forensic interview process and the investigation, because you need the forensic interview to gather information, to help the investigation go somewhere or do something, or make a decision on what they're gonna do.

But the interviewer also needs to know a little bit about what that information needs to entail to ensure that they're gathering what's necessary for the investigation. So Greg, talk a little bit about that transfer of knowledge, like how does an interviewer transfer knowledge to investigators and vice

[00:14:01] **Greg Flett:** versa?

so not being a forensic interviewer went through some training for it and realized very quickly, like I didn't have the skillset. And I think that's one of the things that good forensic interviewers do well is they take in a lot of information quickly in a very short period of time and they share information with others.

And so that. Partnership that needs to happen early is really impressive. I think transferring information within a multidisciplinary team. And you know, when we're talking about the M D T here, we're actually talking about a team within a team, We've got an interviewer, we've got a law enforcement officer and a C p s worker.

a small investigative team The need for that triad to share information effectively, fairly quickly. And to do so with only fairly limited information at that point is a unique skillset that I think needs to be appreciated and even cultivated within a small team setting like that.

Information sharing is one of those things that when you look at some of the research out there about teams that do it well. Are really successful teams that have found systems and structures to help the transfer of that information between individuals are the ones that are able to really capitalize on that knowledge and, and do really good things with it.

So it's an important piece that we see happening. It's one of those things where when it goes well, it goes really well. When it does not, that can lead to some real challenges throughout the investigation.

[00:15:32] **Christina Rouse:** Well, and I'm gonna throw a question in here cuz I know our listeners they're hearing us say information sharing, but they really are like, what information, what's important for us to share with each other?

So when you think about that triad of folks, what should they be sharing with each other to ensure positive

[00:15:50] **Greg Flett:** practice? So I would look at it almost as Multifaceted information first. I think it's important that we share a couple pieces of information about ourselves when we come together in a small team like that.

I think, first off, we can't assume they know each other, And so just some basic information about who I am, how long I've been doing the work, what agency or organization I'm with, that can help to build connections and relationships right off the bat. Then once those relationships are built, I think it's important to share some contextual information about, this is my perspective, this is what I know about the case.

These are the questions I have about it. These are some of the early concerns that are coming to mind. All of these kind of early pieces of information can be really useful to share at that point. And then I think it's important to also mention needs, right off the bat, here's what I'm recognizing is some things I'll need.

To get information around, to have questions answered around so I can continue to do my piece of this project, of this investigative component.

[00:16:51] **Christina Rouse:** So Tony, when you think about being law enforcement, what are some of those needs that you would be coming with or asking for from that triad?

[00:17:01] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Yeah, it's an interesting question. I mean, and just on the surface, all of the things that a law enforcement officer would need, to do their particular part of this job, was there, to keep it very general, any kind of information around has a crime been committed?

because that's what they're gonna come into with their primary focus, Hopefully they're on board with the larger picture, The bigger shared purpose. But, let's

face it, everybody has their own role to play and is gonna be looking for information that's gonna help them do their individual job.

So, any information regarding whether a crime has been committed so the whole piece around getting a disclosure And then on top of that, assuming that does come out, any kind of corroborative information, That will help the law enforcement. And I would just add the legal piece to this too.

Prosecutors, district attorneys, anything that's going to help that part of the team be able to prove their case is gonna be one of the primary needs for law enforcement.

[00:18:06] **Greg Flett:** You're being bashful, Tony, but we know law enforcement also wants to know, was it in my jurisdiction? Like is this my case?

[00:18:12] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Yeah, sure. Yeah. I was trying to keep it general. Yeah, as general as possible, but sure, they're gonna wanna know a lot of that specific type of information

[00:18:20] **Christina Rouse:** then. Yeah. Well, and I think to your point, Greg, like.

There are things that everybody's roles are designated to need to know, Law enforcement needs to know if a crime occurred. Child Protective Services needs to know the safety of the kid and the needs of that family. Our prosecutors need to know if a crime occurred, all the things around that crime to be able to then move forward.

So It's this meeting of the minds where everyone has needs that they're bringing to the table. And if that conversation doesn't take place, there's potential for people to leave that meeting or leave that interaction feeling unfulfilled. So when we think about that, what's the downside of that?

When people leave feeling unfulfilled.

[00:19:06] **Greg Flett:** before we can get into the unfulfilled side. I'll add, it can also leave people operating on assumptions. So as humans, we have a tendency to fill in gaps of knowledge with assumptions, We didn't hear something, we're not sure about what the answer is.

Not that we're trying to, but we tend to make things up using, ideas and beliefs that we have. And that is one of the challenges here. If we are not really clear

about what information we have, what information we need, and how we're sharing that throughout these small teams, we can find, members of these teams operating on assumptions and we all know where that goes.

to your question about feeling unfulfilled. One of the great challenges of working in these interdisciplinary teams is the expectation that others know what I need and others have my interests at heart. Now, I'm not saying that's not true, but sometimes it's not clear.

And so if I'm in an arrangement of other, professionals on my team and I'm operating under the assumption that they have my back. But I walk out of there not getting a piece of information that I needed, or I leave that conversation feeling unfulfilled to use your words. I can start to tell myself stories about what happened there.

They don't care about me. They don't know what I need. They don't get my job. I'm not appreciated on this team. And that's where we start to see some of these structural things that might just be a miss or the lack of a structure that can support good communication. We start to see these structural things transferring into relational things.

You add those assumptions in. You have some of these tense conversations, and now we're moving into this really challenging place on teams, which means that we're not having effective relationships, which then cycles back in and hampers the information sharing in a different kind of way.

So we wanna be tending to the relational side of things, the information sharing side of things. We need this to be working really well and it's harder than it sounds.

[00:21:04] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I think the intention part is really key.

[00:21:08] **Tony DeVincenzo:** I think too to add to what Greg was saying, when you say being unfulfilled, I think a big part of that also can come from again, not understanding that shared mission and not understanding what goes into a forensic interview and how forensic interviews get conducted and all of the dynamics that happen when you're in that room with a child.

Can oftentimes not lead to what one specific discipline wants, but there's reasons behind that. So you may leave unfulfilled, but if you don't understand kind of what's happening in that room and like Greg said earlier, you don't have a team that communicates very well. like Greg said, you're gonna make up

stories on your own about why didn't the forensic interviewer do you know A, B, and C and get me the information that I wanted when there was.

Probably a very good reason, Christina, sometimes it just doesn't happen. It's just not the day, it's not the time, whatever the circumstances are, it's just not gonna happen today. And if that investigative team isn't aware that that's a possibility, That could lead to a lot of challenges on teams and a lot of misunderstandings.

[00:22:17] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I think there's a lot more, to Greg's point of what goes into it is it has to be very transactional, meaning I can't just do my FI without knowing all the things that my law enforcement partners are hoping to get and vice versa.

I. As much as I can as an interviewer, educate myself around the state statutes on child sex crimes and all of the things that law enforcement needs to be able to meet a certain type of crime. As much as I can learn that it doesn't really do much if my law enforcement partner doesn't learn about my process as well.

So there's this real give and take that has to be incorporated in this triad in order for it. To not necessarily work smoothly, cuz these cases don't always work smoothly, but just work. I think that's the end of the sentence is they just need that to work. So let's get into some of these concrete things that we've seen people do.

What are ways that M D T investigators are aligning with the FI process? Along that continuum. So if we're thinking about from the referral to the interview, to the pre and post to case review, where are people instituting alignment practices? What have you guys

[00:23:40] **Greg Flett:** seen?

So one of the early things that I've seen, and I'm a big proponent of it is a check-in It's just an early, Hey, how are you? What's going on? Making sure we know each other, not just diving into it. I am by no means an expert on math, but. If you consider a team I love that you guys are, laugh at me cuz you know where this is going, but if you consider a team, right, say you have two forensic interviewers, let's say you only have four CP S workers, and let's say you only have four law enforcement officers.

My terrible math suggests that that's 32 different combinations. Of those small triad, that small team, that could come together and that might not happen for a couple weeks, depending on how many cases you see and how that goes. So just

diving into, that first and the process, it skips over an important step that we do as humans when we meet people again.

connect with them. Make sure you know who they are, what role they're filling how they're doing, and that I think creates a nice foundation. For good communication, for, transfer of information. But it also lets you ask questions, challenge ideas, make suggestions. It creates that psychological safety within these small teams that we know will help the rest of this alignment process happen fluidly and smoothly.

So that's an important first step that I always advocate for, is don't just dive into it Connect a little bit before you start launching off. I love that Greg's been talking about this whole episode about just how much this is relational, at its core, I think teamwork is about relationships.

[00:25:20] **Tony DeVincenzo:** It's not about transactions. and whatever teams can do to enhance the relationships amongst these players. I know we're talking specifically about this investigative team, but the more you can do to enhance those relationships and it's going to enhance communication is gonna enhance the level of trust, which is just gonna naturally lead to better interactions amongst the team, and then obviously, ultimately right lead to better outcomes for kids and families.

[00:25:49] **Christina Rouse:** I would say as an interviewer, one of the scariest things, Was walking into the observation room before an interview, seeing a detective or a social worker that I had never met before, and this was their case that was way scarier than whatever was gonna happen in 10 minutes in the interview room with that kid.

Cuz I knew that part of my job interacting with a new person who I knew nothing about was the scary part. So I think. Us lifting that component can have people think about different ways they can increase or at least elevate that intentionality around relationship building.

[00:26:31] **Tony DeVincenzo:** And I think, it's one of the challenges that teams are facing right now, With COVID and just being naturally separated from each other. And then all of the transition and turnover that's been happening within all of these agencies. what I have been finding, up here in the northeast is that one of the requests we're getting the most is like, how do we bring these teams back together again?

How do we get reconnected? because the last couple of years has been really hard to stay connected.

[00:26:59] **Greg Flett:** Yeah, good point. I think another thing that I'd love to see a little bit more of, and I've seen plenty of teams do it so even before we get into the content of the case, They. Share what the process is gonna look like. and I'm sure you've got plenty of stories, Christina, about, the new M D T member who wasn't really sure how it's all gonna go. If you skip this step, right, if you skip this process where you say, okay, first we're gonna connect a little bit about the case, then we're gonna go in, I'm gonna do my forensic interview, we're gonna take a break at some point we'll go back in.

And, if you don't lay out that whole process, Again, you have folks wondering what's gonna happen? How do I get my questions in? And I'm sure there's been lots of horror stories out there, and I've heard a few of interviews that have been interrupted by M D T members or things that have gone wrong because I.

A new team member wasn't aware of the process. One of the things I've taken to say more and more lately is, good teams are boring, They have a standardized process. They lay that process out. It's predictable. Everybody knows what's gonna happen. These cases have enough surprises in them.

Without us adding to that. So creating an understandable, predictable process that we just quickly run through at the beginning of, a pre fi conversation is an important first step.

[00:28:14] **Tony DeVincenzo:** I would just add too, another thing I love the idea of. Team forensic interview training, even the protocol training, like, you know, when I got trained and I was trained in child first and I don't know if this was just a New Jersey thing or what, but we had to send a whole team to forensic interview training.

So it was the forensic interviewer, A C P S worker, one of the. Prosecutors, when you were mandated to attend this training as a team. And that just really gave everybody, like Greg just said, a a much more clear understanding of this process of the forensic interview. I think that can go a long way.

And we're actually running a mentor program here in the northeast region and I just got this email this morning about some feedback that they were getting from the mentees and. One of the mentees mentioned it would be really great to bring law enforcement into this mentor program as part of this training.

So they had a better understanding of what it is I do as a forensic interviewer, what that process looks like. What are some of the challenges that pop up in an interview room where I might not be able to get all of that information that

you're looking for. so you're not leaving unfulfilled or frustrated with me because I couldn't get.

A, B, and C from this child.

[00:29:28] **Christina Rouse:** I think that's a great point. That training, again, that transfer of knowledge, Child first sets it up so that. Even if that law enforcement and C p S worker don't actually conduct the fi, they know what to expect. They know the process around it. The prosecutor knows how to defend it because they've seen it.

They understand it. They know the why behind it. That should be the same for those other investigative entities in our jurisdiction. We would go to the sex crime. Course that was being offered in the law enforcement schools because we needed to be educated on that end. We would then also shadow some of our c p s investigators on things that they did.

So it gave us a better understanding of their policies and procedures. And so thinking about how can you use training opportunities as a way to cross train. And share knowledge. Everyone will be so much more well-rounded and have understanding. I think that's the biggest takeaway. Yeah, and I

[00:30:31] **Tony DeVincenzo:** would just add to that.

And as a suggestion for your listeners out there, like, and taking advantage of those informal opportunities for yes, cross education, whether, well, case review is probably a formal place, but whether it's in case review or right before that post fi meeting that you're having with non-offending caregivers or just general interactions with your team, like just to take those opportunities to cross educate about.

Forensic interviewing and child development and why kids aren't disclosing all the time and why they're not providing all the details. I mean, there's so much that forensic interviewers, can do to help educate their team members.

[00:31:07] **Christina Rouse:** Greg, you mentioned the explaining of the process.

Maybe before we actually start the fi I wanna back up just a little bit. let's talk about the referral process. How can M D T investigators and interviewers. Do some things during the referral process that sets the stage for success.

[00:31:27] **Greg Flett:** Yeah, I had a forensic interview I would work with who would tell me that, her forensic interview actually started with the first contact that somebody had with mom.

And it was just a recognition of how much happened before that child was in the room. And I think the same thing goes for the team early communication about the case between these investigators, law enforcement, c p s, and then the forensic interviewer that will again, help set that stage.

And so, As much information as an investigator has, whether it's law enforcement or c p s, if they're communicating that to, let's say it's the c a c, who is taking in that referral and making that schedule that gets shared early with a forensic interviewer so it can help to convey any. Needs that child might have any, background or history that might be relevant.

Anything we can do to help make that family comfortable as they're coming in. And certainly, the interviewers that I would work with They wanted all that, they wanted all that information. They didn't want any surprises, day of. They didn't wanna be scrambling around for an interpreter at the last moment.

They really wanted to make sure that they had everything exactly where it needed to be before they sat down across from that child. And that was one of the things that they said, yeah, this is gonna help my interview process. yeah, I think all of that early information they can get shared and referred.

And what teams can do, back to Tony's point about training is they can do their own internal training about what that is. Checklists protocols that get shared. Really good reinforced tools that help people know what information we need from you how to share it effectively. That can really help this process work

[00:33:09] **Tony DeVincenzo:** smoothly.

I think another piece of that too is. Being intentional with your team about who's explaining this forensic interview process to the family at that time of referral. And making sure that the team is kind of, everybody's using the same language, you know? Yeah. Dare I say, there's almost a script about what's going to happen when you come to the C a C and who are you gonna meet with and what's the forensic process going to be?

And, I love what Craig said. I'm gonna steal that one from you too, about good teams being boring, but having a boring process of the way that whoever it is, Is going to explain the c a c and the forensic interview process to the non-offending caregiver, to a family, I think can go, a really long way.

And I, I talk to law enforcement a lot about being more trauma informed and advocates and whoever's greeting families like we have to remember. And when a family's coming to the center the proverbial poop has hit the fan. This has come out and there's a lot of stress and trauma that they're facing.

And if there's uncertainty on top of that, of not knowing what's going to happen when they get there, you're putting your forensic interviewer in a tough spot right from

[00:34:20] **Christina Rouse:** the get go. Yeah, if we wanna give that, support to our families, we can also extend that to our team members.

Because even though a team is boring, it tells me that there's a formal process and to me, that makes it reliable and I can rely on that happening. And that feels safe. That feels good.

[00:34:43] **Greg Flett:** I think that's where alignment starts. It's clarity of structure, clarity of process. Not to blow up your spot here, Christina, but you prepped Tony and I for this call, right?

I did. As beautiful as this is sounding in the moment now, and I don't want to pull back the curtain too much. Like there's a lot of pre-work that goes even into a podcast like this. We've got instructions, we've got questions in advance. You let us know what we need to do to be prepared, And so that's what we want for our families. We don't want them to see the sausage getting made behind the scenes, so to speak. We want them just to experience a smooth fluid process where, for their child and for themselves, it feels. Like this team has done this a million times cuz they have, and there's no bumps in the road.

And I think that's really where alignment has the most profound impact on what that family's experience

[00:35:35] **Christina Rouse:** is. there's a separate part of being aligned. It's not just for the team it's also for the families. Yeah. I mean, I think

[00:35:42] **Tony DeVincenzo:** alignment demonstrates competence, The more you're aligned, the more confident you are as a team and if you look at any trust model that's out there, Competence is gonna be somewhere in that model. And if we're asking families to trust us, The more competent we seem, the more aligned we seem with each other. just what Craig said, the more they're gonna say, this is a well-oiled machine, These people know what they're doing, I can trust them, everything that's going on in my life right now.

[00:36:10] **Christina Rouse:** so we've talked about the referral. We've talked about pre-interview prep. Let's talk about the actual observation of the fi. I've said this many times before, but I feel like forensic interviewing is not a spectator sport. A lot of times folks get into that observation room and are physically present, but not engaged.

so let's talk about the importance of that attention and awareness during the observation so that alignment can happen post fi, because there's this middle piece that I think we

[00:36:47] **Greg Flett:** forget about.

Yeah. again, back to that reason why I'm not a forensic interviewer. There's always so much going on in that room, So much is going on between that interviewer and that child that, you want those additional sets of eyes involved in that process. And it's not just their eyes.

They're not just looking for things. It is really an additional two thought partners. Taking in that information, digesting it, making sense of it really making or considering the story that that child is telling and how it relates to the components of the case that are gonna need to happen from that point on.

Um, And I think, one of the things that I've always. Really appreciative about good investigators is during that break, We do the, three quarters of an interview, take a break, when that FI goes out there and says, what questions do you have? a lot to share at that point.

That is some of the best conversation I've ever seen happen in A C A C, and it demonstrates to me that they're there, they're part of it. They're, they might as well be in that room sitting next to that forensic interviewer and that's what I'd really love to see in that observation space. Yeah,

[00:37:54] **Tony DeVincenzo:** there's not much I could add to that except that I just think it's critical.

I think it's so important and having been on both ends, I know being in that room, you just miss a lot. sometimes you miss things that are said. Sometimes you miss just a face, a reaction or something like that. That, that if the people in the observation were really paying attention to it, and you take that break, like Greg said, and you come back and say, when you mentioned.

So and so, there was just this reaction that happened that I think you should go back and explore that a little bit and you may have just completely missed that

cuz there's, a lot going on in that interview room, and it's really hard to pick up on every word and every piece of body language.

[00:38:34] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, it's like your team is your extra set of eyes and ears in that observation room. And unfortunately, a lot of times we hear folks say, oh, my teams don't come to the FI because they'll just watch it later. Because they are recorded and so they'll watch it later. So what are some things that we can say to make them value that physical presence of interaction?

[00:39:01] **Greg Flett:** Yeah. I don't know. To me that's like watching a baseball game, A recording of a baseball game that you are a player in, how are you gonna make that play at second base if you are not there? And I think that's one of the missed opportunities when we don't have our investigators.

At these interviews I think one thing you can do to really help them appreciate and understand how valuable they are is to teach them how to do it To my knowledge, I've not seen a workshop at a conference or a training out there yet that titled how to watch and be a good observer of a forensic interview.

And we, assume that people can do it without any prep, without any training whatsoever. I loved what you were sharing earlier, Tony, about team-based forensic interview training because it's not just the person sitting in the room with the child, it's teaching those team members. How to watch, what to listen for, what to pick up for it's not a innate skill.

I think it's something you can cultivate and develop, but it takes some practice. And so supporting them in that is what I would be really excited to see more CACs doing for their team members.

[00:40:04] **Tony DeVincenzo:** I think, people that are observing the interviews are their, like you said, eyes, ears, but I also think their brains too.

Oh yeah. They could be back there developing questions, exploring different ways that an interviewer might be able to approach a child. I think one of the challenges teams have is that we send people to become forensic Interviewers and then they go through the training, they have their protocol and they come back, and then all of a sudden the rest of the team just kind of thinks, okay, you're the expert.

Get in there and get a disclosure for me. Get me the information that I need and everything will be good when, like we've already said, it's not that easy, number one. Right? But All of these people are investigators too. They know how to ask questions, There are certain.

Nuances that you have to know when interviewing a child. But they can weigh in on, maybe you should approach it this way, like I said earlier, I've noticed this reaction. So maybe go back in and explore that or try asking it this way if you can. And that's a back and forth conversation.

Like, how can you go back in and ask about this? Again, without it being leading and all the things that you have to be concerned about as an interviewer, but. I have seen this with a lot of teams and I feel terrible for forensic interviewers get put in that position.

Like you just get sent off the training, you come back and you're expected to be the expert and like, just get in there and do your thing. And there's no team. Involvement. the rest of the team is not helping the interviewer grow. We talk a lot about peer review, now we're doing mentorship and skill building, but I think the team should be involved in helping forensic interviewers grow just as much as as other forensic interviewers, You have law enforcement officers, CPS workers, Prosecutors with years and years of experience working with people and interviewing people, they could play a I think a critical role in helping forensic interviewers develop their skills. I

[00:42:10] **Christina Rouse:** always felt that an interviewer was only as good as their interaction with their team was.

That's what makes interviewers good interviewers is that alignment with their investigators and using each other to grow and learn and advance. I think it's so important.

[00:42:29] **Greg Flett:** Christina, I'm curious though, As a seasoned forensic interviewer, someone who's done it for a long time, does it get challenging when you maybe have team members who do appreciate your expertise and your skill and they kind of say, oh, I don't have to do anything cuz Christina's been doing, you know, this is her 2000th interview.

What can I offer her that she doesn't really already have? How do you pull them in the ones that have been around for a while and you've been around for a while.

[00:42:54] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I think it just goes back to the fact that every case is so different. Yes, I might have done 2000 interviews and you and I have done X amount of interviews with 13 year olds, but not this 13 year old and not this case with these dynamics.

And so every case should be treated like a new unexplored territory that the team, it's almost like you're building your crew of. Adventures and how are we gonna use each other on this new challenge with everyone's skills that they're bringing to the table? And so it's boring, The actions that we're doing are boring, but the information and how we're using each other is new and different every time.

[00:43:41] **Tony DeVincenzo:** think it's one of my favorite sayings, and I'll probably mangle it a little bit, but it's that forensic interviewers don't interview children. They interview the child that's sitting in front of them on that particular day. And every, I mean, I don't know about you, Christina, but every single one of them in my experience has been different.

Yeah. I don't know that I've ever had the exact same child, even if it was the same child, it wasn't always the same child the second time around or the third time around, right? So it's always different, and all of your team members, right? They have experience with kids too. Maybe they have their own kids or nieces and nephews and, you can bring all of that into, this helping Interviewers grow.

[00:44:23] **Greg Flett:** So

[00:44:24] **Christina Rouse:** let's end on thinking about how enhancing alignment between that triad, those M D T investigators and the forensic interview, both the process and the person, how will that enhance the functioning in the long

[00:44:41] **Greg Flett:** run?

So, I think the one thing that I'm most excited about at, focusing on M D T alignment with the forensic interview process is the capacity that has for setting the stage for coordination and collaboration moving forward. This is a critical juncture in the life cycle of this case, and I feel that for a while we've underappreciated how.

Pivotal it is in setting the stage for what happens next. A lot of times work with a lot of teams and, everybody's worried about engagement at case review. They're worried about people showing up and participating in case review. And for me, I don't know, I'm, I'd much rather have good engagement.

Participation at that fi because from there you can do all of that work, You are then gonna continue to investigate, to interrogate subjects, to collect additional evidence to support that family in lots of different ways. And if you set the stage

for really good alignment and collaboration at that point, so much stuff can happen after that.

I think that's really the benefit. The biggest benefit for me of this early alignment around this FI process. And I

[00:45:53] **Tony DeVincenzo:** think, just at a core level too the more you're aligned, the more you understand each other. The better information you're gonna get. you're gonna be able to get better information from, non-offending caregiver or whomever's bringing the child to the c a c in that pre fi interview.

If you're all aligned and you're actively observing the forensic interview and you're taking that break and having a, a good conversation during that break, it's gonna result in a better forensic interview with. Better information generated from that child and then it just kind of leads you right into what Greg said, then all of that information is just gonna lead you to better processes moving forward, whatever that might look like.

[00:46:39] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah. And we mentioned this already that the more. Prepared and equipped and competent the team feels. The family in turn is gonna feel that as well. And at the end of the day, this is about how we can make the process better for the children and families we serve.

So this has been a fantastic conversation. I wanna thank you both for joining me on our adventure of this conversation. It's been a pleasure having you guys hang out with me.

[00:47:07] **Greg Flett:** Yeah, a lot of fun. In fact, I can't even believe we're done. We might have to do a part two. This was exciting. I really love talking with you both about this topic.

You know how much I love it. So thanks for the opportunity, Christina.

[00:47:17] **Tony DeVincenzo:** Yeah, thank you for the invitation. I could talk about this all day long, so I'm definitely up for a part two if you wanna go down that road. But thanks again. I appreciate it.